



## Fact Sheet:



# Replacement Narcotic Therapy: Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is replacement narcotic therapy***

Replacement narcotic therapy is used and medically supervised in the treatment of addicted persons whose addiction was acquired or supported by the use of a narcotic drug. There are two medications currently approved to treat narcotic addiction, they are methadone and LAAM.

### ***Are these medications addictive?***

Like several other useful drugs, narcotic medications produce physical dependence. However, the term "addiction" refers to behavior that is compulsive, out of control, and persists in spite of adverse consequences. If someone on replacement narcotic therapy is not using illicit drugs, using only the legal ones as prescribed, this therapy can be viewed as simply another medication.

### ***What is replacement narcotic therapy used for?***

1. Relief of pain in general medical practice.
2. Treatment of narcotic addiction.

### ***Do these medications have side effects?***

The medications used in replacement narcotic therapy do cause physical dependence. They have no known serious or prolonged side effects, even when taken daily for several years.

### ***Why are these medications helpful in the treatment of narcotic addiction?***

Both are longer acting than heroin and other street abused narcotics. The effects of methadone last 24-48 hours compared with heroin's 4-6 hours. The effects of LAAM suppress symptoms of withdrawal up to 72 hours and block the "high" often associated with illicit opiate use.

Each medication is effectively ingested orally. None of the problems common with intravenous drug abuse are present with the oral administration of these medications. Because they are long acting, methadone is generally administered only once daily and LAAM is administered every 48-72 hours. Consequently, rather than cycling from craving, to a high or euphoric state, to nodding, to restlessness and back to craving every few hours due to the opiate addiction, the maintenance patient has a much more stabilized life. This stability permits patients to work full time, attend full time educational programs, and be a responsible parent and homemaker without the disruptive effects of heroin and other street narcotic drugs.

### ***How effective is replacement narcotic therapy?***

Maintenance patients dramatically reduce illicit drug use. Over time, most patients in treatment completely eliminate all illicit drug use.

More than 50 percent of maintenance patients in treatment six months or more are employed full time, are full time students, or

are responsible homemakers. The need for illegal activities to support illicit drug use is reduced or eliminated.

In summary, replacement narcotic therapy is an effective treatment tool that, over time, substantially reduces or eliminates those problems directly linked to illicit street narcotic use.

***How are narcotic treatment services funded?***

Narcotic treatment services in California are privately paid and publicly funded. Federal, state, and local funds go to programs through county and direct provider contracts to assist with payment for services to patients who are unable to pay. Funding sources also include Medi-Cal, and third party payers such as insurance companies.

***Who runs narcotic treatment programs?***

About 94 percent of California's narcotic treatment programs are privately operated. The remainders are operated by city or county governments. Treatment aspects of each program are under the supervision of a medical director, who is a licensed medical doctor. Overall program operation is the responsibility of a designated program director.